



MAYOR ALAN AUTRY

## **EDUCATION REFORM: A CALL TO ACTION**

Over a period of years, I have fought to reveal the truth regarding the public school system in California. It has been, and will doubtlessly continue to be, an arduous yet critically important crusade for California's cities – a crusade that must be relentlessly endured and successful if we are to secure a healthy quality of life for our children and grandchildren. The truth that is becoming increasingly apparent to more and more Californians every day is that public education is not responsive to the needs of our community and under the present structure, is incapable of achieving the quantum improvement necessary for success. It is in fact and without exaggeration – dysfunctional.

I have illustrated that control of this most necessary public institution is not vested in the hearts, minds and hands of local leaders but rather in the tangled mess of political special interest, bureaucracy, cronyism and turfism of Sacramento and the dysfunction of local governance. I have insisted, from the beginning, that it is the "system" that is irreparably broken and not the teachers, administrators and staff who invariably endeavor to positively affect children's lives in spite of the roadblocks under continuous construction by the status quo. The overwhelming response from the community to this litany of imperative topics is that change is not only essential, it is mandatory.

Leaders of cities that are enjoying renewed vigor and prosperity cite fundamental changes in their method of education governance as the genesis of their success. The future vitality of Fresno is inextricably connected to the quality of our education system and we have no higher purpose than to assure its responsiveness to our unique and dynamic needs. Regaining local control of our educational destiny is an essential prerequisite to the goal of bringing jobs and renewed prosperity to Fresno. But, time is running short and the future of public education is in jeopardy.

With the convergence of issues such as the following: 1) the ramifications of the Supreme Court's recent decision regarding vouchers looming on the horizon, 2) the dismal performance of our nation's schools in general (and California in particular), 3) the requirement in the President's "No Child Left Behind" Act that allows parents to remove their children from a failing school and have them transported at district expense to a better-performing public or charter school, 4) the public outcry for change, and 5) the apparent inability of school boards to act as anything more than a springboard for individual political agendas, it seems that public education is destined to become merely a vestige for the have-nots of society. My efforts with regard to education reform are aimed at preserving the value of our investment in public education and returning it to its rightful place of honor in our community.

I remain committed to the pursuit of systemic change in education governance and will continue the campaign to gain mayoral authority to appoint an "Education Board of Directors". I disagree with those who say that the office of the mayor should be rendered powerless in matters related to our schools. In fact, it is stated in Article IV of the Fresno City Charter that the mayor is "...responsible for providing leadership and taking issues to the people and marshalling public interest in and support for municipal activity..." The mayor is required to accept accountability for all matters affecting the community – not the least of which is an impenetrable connection of city and education leadership.

Lately, some notable and respected local organizations have become involved in the quest for education reform. Although some of their proposed methods are fundamentally different from what I believe are the core barriers to a long-term systemic transformation, I nevertheless applaud their effort to engage this critical issue and pledge my support to the pursuit of educational equality.

Attached is "The Mayor's Contract For Kids", an accounting of issues that should be the core of any effort to affect education reform. It illustrates what I believe are the most egregious barriers to the success of our schools and the future of our children. It will serve as my solemn pledge of personal commitment to education reform in our community.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Alan Autry". The signature is fluid and stylized, with a large loop at the end of the last name.

Alan Autry  
Mayor



MAYOR ALAN AUTRY

## **THE MAYOR'S CONTRACT FOR KIDS**

### **I. Board of Trustees**

- A.** The Board is ultimately accountable for every aspect of educational excellence. Under the current structure, the connection between Board accountability and the Community has been severed.
  - 1.** The Board will accept responsibility and accountability for assuring the achievement of long term systemic change in education governance.
  - 2.** The Board will initiate legislative action written specifically for the purpose of addressing the needs of the district with regard to issues such as: block grant funding, relaxation and/or elimination of education code mandates, authoritative control, etc.
- B.** The Board is responsible for maintaining exclusive authority for the creation and enforcement of policy that places students' needs above all. However, the percentage of the budget that is spent in areas other than the classroom is disproportionate to the priority needs of the children. There is crisis in our schools and it is essential that Board leadership have the courage, dedication, knowledge and skills to administer policies that put children first.
  - 1.** The Board will concentrate on placing financial, administrative and operational control in the hands of local education and municipal leadership.

## **II. Fiscal and Administrative Audit**

- A.** Fiscal, administrative and operational accountability is the cornerstone of successful organizations and any effort to reform public education must begin with a clear understanding of these various elements.
  - 1.** The Board will commission an external audit of district finances and operational efficiency. This comprehensive examination will provide the basis for charting a responsive, effectual budget that concentrates on classroom needs first.
  - 2.** The Board will assure that the budget reflects the priorities of the District and will resolutely shift resources to initiatives that ensure the needs of the classroom receive first funding priority throughout the budget process.
- B.** Additionally, it is well documented that the District loses millions of dollars annually due to its inability to achieve some measure of full attendance.
  - 1.** The Board will establish a plan to recover this otherwise lost revenue by committing to proven policies, methods and procedures that address daily attendance.
- C.** A process that tracks students when they are absent and when they relocate to another school within or outside the District is essential to the maintenance of an accurate and useful student profile database.
  - 1.** The Board will direct staff to cooperatively and expeditiously explore the potential of partnering with other governmental entities to develop a comprehensive student tracking and record coordination system.

## **III. Pay for Performance (Management)**

- A.** Clearly communicated performance expectations will motivate behavior and determine results.
  - 1.** Compensation for all exempt personnel (those employees who are not represented by an acknowledged union contract) will be based on achievement of specific performance criteria as set forth in a formal district-wide management 'Pay-For-Performance' policy.

## IV. Union Relations

A. It is commonly accepted that constraints associated with some draconian union contract requirements serve as barriers to the efficient utilization of resources. An organization's effectiveness in carrying out its objectives is directly related to their willingness to engage unions for the purpose of understanding and working toward the achievement of mutual goals. This position is not an attempt to undermine unions but rather a call to cooperate in the development of complimentary philosophies, policies and agreements. Based on input from teachers, administrators and others, what follows are education/union issues that must be addressed:

1. **Teacher Transfer Policy** – The seniority system of allocating teacher resources limits the district's ability to deploy teachers where they are most needed.
  - a) The Board will facilitate discussions with Union representatives for the purpose of negotiating a method that will make it possible to locate teachers throughout the district so their skills can match the needs of students.
2. **Scheduling** – The rigidity of the current contract does not allow flexibility for teachers to adapt their schedules to accommodate the needs of students.
  - a) The Board will facilitate discussions with Union representatives for the purpose of establishing teacher authority to evaluate circumstances and adapt their schedules without the burden of contractual interference or dogmatic controls.
3. **Performance Measurements** – An organization's efficiency is directly related to how it measures success. Without clearly communicated measurable objectives that correspond to district values and student achievement, failure is eminent.
  - a) The Board will facilitate discussions with Union representatives for the purpose of establishing standards by which teacher performance can be evaluated relative to student achievement.
4. **Classroom Discipline** – Without order and decorum in the classroom, a teacher's ability to create an environment in which students are expected to learn is nearly impossible.
  - a) The Board will facilitate discussions with Union representatives for the purpose of establishing regulations that will allow teachers to take the necessary steps to maintain a safe and productive learning environment.

- b) The Board will act as the teachers' advocate with regard to matters of classroom discipline. Teachers must have confidence that the Board will support their supervision of the classroom and not succumb to political expediency.

**5. Teacher Discipline** – The need for teacher discipline is extremely rare and fortunately the vast majority of performance and conduct issues can be resolved through the application of an effective management strategy. There are situations, however, in which a teacher has chosen not to accept the opportunity to succeed and subsequently puts the well being of students at risk.

- a) The Board will facilitate discussions with Union representatives for the purpose of determining methods that will allow school administrators to act on matters involving teacher discipline swiftly, justly and in keeping with district values and applicable law.

## V. Curriculum

The standard measurement of student achievement is the API and FUSD is typically represented at the bottom of the ledger even when compared to districts with similar demographics. A Board policy that emphasizes the basic tools that serve to prepare a student for a lifetime of learning must be the guiding principle when determining curriculum strategy and achievement criteria. The following is based on exploration and research of proven formulas:

- A. English Immersion** – As a result of its heavy reliance on bilingual curricula, FUSD is the slowest district in the state to show improvement in English proficiency. A child that does not read at grade level by the age of eight years has only a one in eight chance of ever reading at grade level.
  - 1. The Board will establish a specific improvement strategy to assure grade level English reading proficiency for every child by the end of the third grade.
- B. Literacy** – Grade level competency in English composition and comprehension must be as important in a Health class as it is in a Literature class.
  - 1. The Board will establish policy that will require mandatory reading, writing and recitation aptitude in every classroom curriculum – regardless of subject.
- C. Math and Science** – Equal rigor must be applied to the goal of grade level competency in math and science.

**D. Physical Education** – Students who participate in quality physical education programs receive a variety of benefits, including (1) the development of a variety of motor skills and abilities; (2) an understanding of the importance of maintaining a healthy lifestyle; (3) self confidence and a sense of self worth; (4) an appreciation of teamwork and how it will benefit life's endeavors.

1. The Board will establish policy that will require mandatory physical education courses at every grade level.

**E. Student Promotion** – The only criteria for assessing a student's readiness to pass from one grade to another will be grade level proficiency, not their age. The so-called practice of "failing a student forward" will not be tolerated.

## **VI. Character Counts**

**A.** Character, based on sound moral principles, is the cornerstone of a productive and fulfilling life and the expected norm in our society.

1. The Board will assure that character education is a mandatory element in the district curriculum strategy.
2. The Board will establish policy that assures that a comprehensive district-wide "Character Counts" program will be instituted and led by the district superintendent.
3. Every individual will be held accountable for their contribution to the program, the success of the educational process and the promise of a safe campus environment for every student.

## **VII. Administration, Teacher and Student Appearance Requirement**

**A.** The establishment of appearance requirements and a prerequisite dress code will create a sense of professionalism and mutual respect on campus.

1. The Board will establish policy that will enact appearance and dress requirements throughout the district. Conformance will be expected at every position in the district hierarchy – including the Board, administration, teacher, student, classified, etc.

## **VIII. After School and Adult Mentor Programs**

- A.** The combination of public and private resources must be utilized to provide a safe and enriching environment for students during the critical after school hours of 3:00 to 6:00 PM and during the summer and weekends.
- B.** Schools should be the centers of our community and there are caring adults from all walks of life who are willing and anxious to help children in ways that would otherwise be unavailable to them. A welcome and encouraging environment promotes this type of dynamic partnership.

## **IX. On-Site Facilities**

- A.** State law has declared that every student will be provided the opportunity for an "...equal and common..." education. Our on-site facilities, however, are anything but equal and common. Every child deserves to attend a school that has accessible restrooms that are clean and sanitary, roofs that don't leak, heaters that heat and air conditioning that works. They should have the same access to modern technological learning tools as do students in other schools in the district.
  - 1.** The Board will direct staff to prepare a comprehensive analysis of district facilities for the purpose of comparison and reprioritization of capital improvements so that campuses with the most need receive first consideration.

## **X. Campus Safety**

- A.** Learning is directly related to the environment in which it is presented. The physical environment is as important as the academic. When campus conditions are plagued with the consequences of drugs and violence, the education process is rendered helpless.
  - 1.** The Board will initiate a comprehensive "Zero Tolerance" policy relative to drugs and violence on campus. Additionally, staff will be directed to prepare an action plan in cooperation with any outside agencies that are relevant to the assurance of a safe, drug and violence free campus environment.



## **In Conclusion**

The level of success achieved by our public school system is the most important economic indicator affecting our community. Our quality of life is directly related to the success or failure of our schools. The bonding of City and School District governance is mandatory if we are to achieve our objectives of new and better jobs, higher incomes, safer neighborhoods, diverse economies and a quality of life that is the envy of every city in the nation. We have the vision, talent and resources to make this a reality but if we think we can wait for the state or federal governments to "...make it better...", we will fail. If it is going to be, we must all accept accountability and understand that there is no excuse for defeat. The destiny of our children and our city is in our hands.

## **Therefore:**

**I hereby acknowledge my commitment to the pursuit of every child's inalienable right to an equal and common education. I will dedicate myself to the principles charted in The Mayor's Contract For Kids, as well as any worthy commitment or endeavor that seeks to ensure a quality education for all the children of Fresno regardless of ethnicity, religion or socio-economic position.**

Mayor Alan Autry  
Name

  
Signature

October 10, 2002  
Date